

THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

Historic Pioneers

Their History
Their Mission
Their Impact

Compiled by

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The legendary Tuskegee Airmen fought battles on two fronts: in the air against the Axis powers in Europe, and at home against racism and intolerance.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt maybe at the urging of his wife Eleanor, ordered the creation of an all-black flight training unit at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Howard University student Yancy Williams had already filed suit in federal court to force the military to accept black trainees. Tuskegee Airmen and retired Lt. Col. Herbert Carter said, "Can you imagine, with the war clouds heavy over Europe, a citizen of the United States having to sue his government to be accepted into training so he could fly and fight and die for his country?" While the expression "fighting for freedom" is so common today, it is especially astonishing that these black citizen soldiers were willing to sacrifice their lives for a system so badly flawed, one in which their freedom came with intolerable compromises.

The Tuskegee Airmen Experiment was was expected to fail but, as Carter said, "The mistake they made was that they forgot to tell us." The military brass expected that "coloreds" would be unable to operate a complex flying machine. The trainees they were not even issued rifles like white cadets because it was expected that the program would be quietly shelved.

The first class was only 13 men, all already civilian pilots and all with college degrees, including some Ph.D.s. It was led by Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a West Point graduate, the first African American officer to solo an Army aircraft and the first black general in the U.S. Air Force.

Many months passed with no combat assignment for the black units. In 1943, when the War Department could drag its feet no longer, the first elements of the black squadrons were deployed in North Africa, Sicily, and the rest of Europe. Their performance was outstanding and one flight shot down six German aircraft. They also became so proficient at escorting heavy bombers that the crews of those aircraft came to call them Red Tail Angels, referring to the distinctive red the unit chose to paint the tails of their fighter aircraft. The nickname was eventually shortened to Red Tails.

By the end of the war, the 332nd Fighter Group had shot down 112 enemy aircraft and destroyed 150 on the ground. Their effect on enemy transportation was also significant with the unit destroying more than 600 railroad cars and 40 boats and barges. In one noteworthy engagement, they even managed to sink a destroyer. By any measure, the Tuskegee experiment was a resounding success.

In addition to their military impact, the Tuskegee Airmen contributed to the struggle for civil rights, that can place them in the same conversation with paving the way for Dr. Martin Luther King, the Little Rock Nine, and Detroit's own Rosa Parks.

BY THE TAIL: The 'Tuskegee' story captures essence of Civil Rights struggle
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Tuskegee Airmen facts

Tuskegee Airmen shot down fewer enemy aircraft than the other P 51 fighter groups, and had no aces with five aerial victory credits, because they were staying closer to the bombers they were escorting. The total number of Fifteenth Air Force bombers shot down by enemy aircraft between June 1944 and May 1945, when the 332nd Fighter Group was assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force, was 303. The total number of 332nd Fighter Group-escorted bombers shot down by enemy aircraft was 27. 46 is the average number of bombers shot down by enemy aircraft when those bombers were under the escort of one of the other fighter groups.

The military selected Tuskegee Institute to train pilots because of its commitment to aeronautical training. Tuskegee had the facilities, and engineering and technical instructors, as well as a climate for year round flying. The first Civilian Pilot Training Program students completed their instruction in May 1940. The Tuskegee program was then expanded and became the center for African-American aviation during World War II. The Tuskegee Airmen overcame segregation and prejudice to become one of the most highly respected fighter groups of World War II. They proved conclusively that African Americans could fly and maintain sophisticated combat aircraft. The Tuskegee Airmen's achievements, together with the men and women who supported them, paved the way for full integration of the U.S. military.

On November 6, 1998, President Clinton approved Public Law 105-355, which established the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site at Moton Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, to commemorate and interpret the heroic actions of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. The new site contains a museum and interpretive programs at the historic complex at Moton Field as well as a national center based on a public-private partnership.

The most famous of the 332d Fighter Group commanders was Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. His father had been the first African American general in the U.S. Army. Partly because he was a graduate of West Point, Colonel Davis had already been commander of the 99th Fighter Squadron, the first black flying unit in the Army Air Corps. The 99th Fighter Squadron deployed from Tuskegee, Alabama, to French Morocco in April 1943. Originally flying the P40 Warhawk aircraft, the 99th Fighter Squadron began combat operations from Tunisia on June 2. While serving under the Twelfth Air Force, the 99th and other fighter and bomber squadrons attacked enemy installations in Tunisia and Sicily and on the island of Pantelleria in the Mediterranean Sea.

On 2 July 1943, 99th Fighter Squadron pilots escorted B-25 medium bombers in an attack on Castelvetro, Italy. Enemy FW 190 fighters rose to intercept the bombers, and the Tuskegee P-40s intervened. On that day Lt. Charles B. Hall scored the squadron's first aerial victory. Never before had an African-American fighter pilot in the U.S. armed forces shot down an enemy aircraft. Eight fighter squadrons were involved in the air defense of Anzio on January 27 and 28, and together they shot down a total of 32 enemy aircraft. Of these, the 99th had the highest score, with 13. The most enemy aircraft shot down by any of the other squadrons

in those two days was seven. Black fighter pilots proved that they could shoot down enemy aircraft as well as their white counterparts after all.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Tuskegee Airmen were dedicated, determined young men who enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps to become America's first black military airmen. They accepted the challenge during a time when many people thought that blacks were inferior to whites in intelligence, skill, courage and patriotism.

Three government initiatives happened between 1938 and 1940 and were instrumental in paving the way for blacks to participate in the nation's defense and for blacks to become military pilots. In 1938, the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP), a new flight training initiative sponsored by the federal government, was launched to increase the number of civilian pilots in the United States, who could possibly be used as potential military pilots, if needed. This program gave many black college students a chance to earn their private pilot license. Several black colleges, including Tuskegee Institute, participated in the program. However, learning to fly in the CPTP was different than becoming a military aviator in the Air Corps. Then in 1940, the Selective Service and Training Service Act, was passed by U.S. Congress on Sept. 16, 1940, and was then signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This act also known as the Burke-Wadsworth Act and was the first peace-time draft in the United States' history. Under the Burke-Wadsworth Act, all American males between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five years had to register for the draft. The final version of the bill contained two provisions, 3(a) and 4 (a), that spoke to the discrimination question. Section 3(a), stated - "Within the limits of the quota determined...Any person regardless of race or color.....shall be afforded an opportunity to volunteer for induction..." and 4(a) - "In the selection and training of men under this Act, and in the interpretation and execution of the provision of this Act, there shall be no discrimination against any person on account of race or color."

That same year, the War Department announced that the Civil Aeronautics Authority, in cooperation with the U.S. Army, would start the development of "colored personnel" for the aviation service, this paved the way for blacks to train as pilots and as vital support personnel. These men and women came from every part of the country, with large numbers coming from the cities of New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit. Each one possessed a strong personal desire to serve the United States of America at the best of his ability. The military selected the Tuskegee Institute to train pilots because of its commitment to aeronautical training. The first aviation class with 13 cadets began July 19, 1941, with ground school training in subjects such as meteorology, navigation, and instruments. Successful cadets then transferred to the segregated Tuskegee Army Air Field (TAAF) to complete the Army Air Corps pilot training. In March 1942, five of the 13 cadets in the first class completed the Army Air Corps pilot training program and earned their silver wings and became the nation's first black military pilots. They were second lieutenants Lemuel R. Custis, Charles DeBow, Mac Ross, George Spencer Roberts and Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., a West Point Academy graduate.

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. later became the leader of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II and the first black to become general in the Air Force.

Three hundred and fifty-five of the pilots, who trained at the Tuskegee Army Flying School, served overseas with the 99th Pursuit Squadron (later the 99th Fighter Squadron) and the 332nd Fighter Group.

In addition to training fighter pilots, Tuskegee also graduated a group of twin-engine pilots. They were assigned to the 477th Bombardment Group, who flew the B-25 Billy Mitchell, a twin engine-medium bomber. The group was activated with four squadrons: The 616th, 617th, 618th and the 619th Squadrons, however, the war against Japan ended before the 477th Group could be deployed overseas.

From 1941 through 1946 close to 1,000 pilots graduated from Tuskegee Army Air Field, receiving commissions and pilot wings. The black navigators, bombardiers and gunnery crews were trained at other selected military bases elsewhere in the United States. Mechanics were initially trained at Chanute Air Base in Rantoul, Ill. until facilities were in place in 1942 at TAAF.

“Tuskegee Airmen” include the men who were involved under the “Tuskegee Military Experiment” from 1941 to 1946. That “experiment” is now referred to as the “Tuskegee Experience,” by Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. The Tuskegee Airmen “Experience” extends up until the year 1949, and includes all individuals, men and women at TAAF and other designated units or locations up until the desegregation of the 332nd Fighter Wing at Lockbourne Air Base, Ohio. The term “Documented Original Tuskegee Airmen” or “DOTA” was adopted by TAI and includes vetted personnel who were trained or stationed at TAAF during the period from 1941 to 1949. These members include bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all other personnel, black and white who supported the aircraft in the air or operations on the ground.

In 1948, President Harry Truman enacted Executive Order Number 9981, which directed equality of treatment and opportunity to all in the United States Armed Forces. This order, in time, led to the end of racial segregation in the military forces. This was also the first step toward racial integration in the United States of America. The newly formed United States Air Force began plans to integrate its units as early as 1949.

These men fought two wars - one against a military enemy force overseas and another one against racism at home.

The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 1200 missions for the 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302nd Fighter Squadrons under 12th Air Force. The 332d Fighter Group under 15th Air Force flew at least 311 missions between June 1944 and May 1945. ←

The 99th Fighter Squadron and the 332d Fighter Group had a total of 112 aerial victories during World War II.

Ninety-six Distinguished Flying Crosses were awarded to members of the 332d Fighter Group or its squadrons. The 332d Fighter Group shot down enemy aircraft on 21 missions for 15th Air Force. The Tuskegee Airmen flew four different types of aircraft in combat; the P-40, P-39, P-47, and P-51. Four Tuskegee Airmen earned three aerial victory credits in one day (Joseph Elsberry, Clarence Lester, Lee Archer, and Harry Stewart)

The 99th Fighter Squadron earned two Distinguished Unit Citations, and the 332d Fighter Group earned one after the 99th Fighter Squadron was assigned to it.

The Tuskegee Airmen Why Significant?

The Tuskegee Airmen and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site are significant for several reasons:

(1)

The struggle of African Americans for greater roles in North American military conflicts spans four centuries. Opportunities for African American participation in the U.S. military were always very limited and controversial. Quotas, exclusion, and racial discrimination were based on the prevailing attitude in the United States, particularly on the part of the U.S. military, that African Americans did not possess the intellectual capacity, aptitude, and skills to be successful fighters. Political pressure exerted by the black press, civil rights groups, historically black colleges and universities, and others, resulted in the formation of the Tuskegee Airmen, making them an excellent example of the struggle by African Americans to serve in the United States military.

(2)

In the early 1940s, key leaders within the United States Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces) did not believe that African Americans had the intellectual capacity to become successful military pilots. After succumbing to the pressure exerted by civil rights groups and black leaders, the army decided to train a small number of African American pilot cadets under special conditions. Although prejudice and discrimination against African Americans occurred throughout the nation, it was more intense in the South where it had hardened into rigidly enforced patterns of segregation. Such was the environment that the military chose to locate the training of the Tuskegee Airmen.

(3)

The military selected Tuskegee Institute (Tuskegee University) as a civilian contractor for a variety of reasons. These included the school's existing facilities, engineering and technical instructors, and a climate with ideal flying conditions year round; and the racial climate of central Alabama. Tuskegee Institute's (Tuskegee University's) strong interest in providing aeronautical training for African American youth was also an important factor, Tuskegee's students and faculty had designed and constructed Moton Field as a site for its military pilot training program and named it for the school's second president Robert Russa Moton.

(4)

In 1941, the Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces) awarded a contract to Tuskegee Institute (Tuskegee University) to operate a primary flight school at Moton Field. Consequently, Tuskegee Institute (Tuskegee University) was one of a very few American institutions - and the only African American institution -to own, develop, and control facilities for military flight instruction.

(5)

Moton Field was the only primary flight training facility for African American pilot candidates in the U.S. Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces) during World War II. Thus, the facility symbolizes the entrance of African American pilots into the Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces) and the singular role of Tuskegee Institute (Tuskegee University) in providing economic and educational resources to make that entry possible, although on a segregated basis.

(6)

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American soldiers to successfully complete their training and enter the Army Air Corps (Army Air Forces). Almost 1000 aviators were produced as America's first African American military pilots. In addition, more than 10,000 military and civilian African American men and women served in a variety of support roles.

(7)

Although military leaders were hesitant to use the Tuskegee Airmen in combat, the airmen eventually saw considerable action in North Africa and Europe. Acceptance from Army Air Forces units came slowly, but their courageous and, in many cases, heroic performance earned them increased combat opportunities and respect.

(8)

The success of the Tuskegee Airmen proved to the American public that African Americans, when given the opportunity, could become effective military leaders and pilots. Modeled on the professionalism of Chief Alfred Anderson, Benjamin O. Davis, and Daniel “Chappie” James, their performance helped pave the way for desegregation of the military, beginning with President Harry S Truman's Executive Order 9981 in 1948. It also helped set the stage for civil rights advocated to continue the struggle to end racial discrimination during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Consequently, the story of the Tuskegee Airmen constitutes a powerful and seminal metaphor for the struggle of black freedom in America.

(9)

The Tuskegee Airmen reflect the struggle of African Americans to achieve equal rights, not only through legal attacks on the system of segregation, but also through the techniques of nonviolent direct action aimed at segregation in the military. The members of the 477th Bombardment Group, who staged a nonviolent demonstration to desegregate the officers' club at Freeman Field, Indiana, helped set the pattern for direct action protests popularized by civil rights activists in later decades.

(The above information is excerpted from the Tuskegee Airmen Long-Range Interpretive Plan 2003 and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site’s enabling legislation—Public Law 105-355)

When asked how young people today should chase their dreams, Tuskegee Airman Col. Charles McGeeshared a formula called the Four P’s:

- Perceive - Determine Your Talents
- Prepare - Education is Key
- Perform - Do Your Best Even in the Small Jobs as you Work Your Way Toward Your Goal
- Persevere - Don’t Look for Excuses Not To Achieve

The Tuskegee Airmen had to overcome hatefulness by brethren fighting towards an equal goal.

**Application for Claude B. Govan Tri-State Chapter Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.
Academic Tuition Assistance Award**



RETURN COMPLETED APPLICATION DATED NOT LATER THAN APRIL 14, 2017

**MAIL TO: CLAUDE B. GOVAN TRI-STATE CHAPTER, TAI
250 MERRICK ROAD, PO BOX 763
ROCKVILLE CENTER, NEW YORK. 11571
Attn. Tuition Assistance Committee**

THIS APPLICATION IS FOR COLLEGE BOUND HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS ONLY

PART I - (To be completed by Student Applicant)

The application below is my application for 2017 Claude B. Govan Chapter, Tri-State Chapter Tuskegee Inc. Academic Tuition Assistance Award

NAME: _____ **DOB:** ____/____/____ **Sex:** _____

Social Security Number: ____/____/____ **Home Telephone ()** _____ **Cell ()** _____

ADDRESS: _____ **City:** _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Name of High School: _____

Address: _____

Graduation Date: _____ **SAT or ACT (circle one) Scores: (E)** _____ **(M)** _____ **GPA:** _____

Do you participate in Jr. ROTC Program, Civil Air Patrol, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc? Yes () No ()
(Please furnish detailed information about these or any other academic or community extra-curricula activities. Use a separate sheet).

Name and Address of College you plan to attend: _____

Intended Major: _____ **Minor:** _____

Career Objective: _____

I grant permission for your organization to provide this application to other agencies offering scholarship programs: Yes () No ()

Signature of Applicant: _____ **Date:** ____/____/____

PART II - (To be completed by Applicant's Parent, Parent In Loco Parentis, or Guardian)

Name: _____ **Address:** _____

Relationship: _____ **Total number of persons residing in your household:** _____

Other family members attending college: _____ **Total family income: \$** _____

I certify that the information provided above is true and correct:

Signature: _____ **Date:** ____/____/____

PART III - (To be completed by school official)

Official Copy of Student's High School Transcript:

Signature: _____ **Title:** _____ **Date:** ____/____/____

ATTACHMENTS REQUIRED

- 1. Official copy of the high school transcript (as provided by the school)**
- 2. A copy of parent(s) prior year IRS Form 1040 (through line 31)**
- 3. Three (3) letters of recommendation from (Community Leader, Instructor, Counselor, Teacher, etc.)**
- 4. Write an essay entitled "The Tuskegee Airmen" expressing what the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen means to you personally and how you can become an active part of that legacy.**
- 5. Each applicant must submit a two (2)-page essay containing a brief biographical sketch, educational aspirations, career goals and an explanation of why financial aid is essential. (Typed, double-spaced, not to exceed two (2) pages.)**
- 6. List of extracurricular and community activities in which you have been or are currently involved.**

Applications received incomplete will be automatically disqualified.

Note: Tuition Assistance Award will be sent directly to your college of choice, upon receipt of letter (on College Letterhead) confirming your acceptance.